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To the Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee:

I am writing you today to express my concern for House Bill 5012, The Nursing Home Staffing and Quality Care Act. As a speech-language pathologist practicing in skilled nursing homes across New England, I have seen the devastating impact of COVID on the Rehabilitation workforce across the states. Therapists have lost hours, benefits and already suffered wage decreases upwards of 10% at a time when health care costs are at a premium. These same therapists have walked into COVID-positive facilities day after day to do their jobs, at risk to themselves and to their families, without hesitation and unjustly, without recognition. As a consequence, many speech-language pathologists in particular are relocating to steady school-based positions. Nursing homes represent two parts to the post-acute care environment: skilled nursing *and rehabilitation*. If there is further damage to compensation, facilities may need to limit service provision from rehabilitation experts like speech pathologists who evaluate and manage choking episodes and swallowing disorders. I fear that unfunded staffing mandates for skilled nursing facilities will only increase the difficulty in retaining experienced nursing and rehabilitation staff. Further wage reductions and cuts in staffing Rehab Departments will undoubtedly follow if the 4.1 hour staffing mandate is put into effect without financial support.

An unfunded staffing mandate risks placing facilities into unbalance. Requiring pay for more nursing and nursing assistant hours will force reductions in other departments that also strongly support patients' well-being and healing, such as Rehabilitation. This legislation would cripple the ability of skilled nursing facilities to operate in the best interests of their patients because the money to support such a staffing mandate would have to be drawn from other departments that are already being defunded.

Our aging population deserves access to quality nursing and rehabilitation care. Please preserve skilled nursing and rehabilitation by addressing the *complete* picture of a skilled nursing facility.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katrina Woodward', written in a cursive style.

Katrina Woodward